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Nelson

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[54] **INDOORS MINIATURE BASKETBALL PRACTICE APPARATUS**

[76] Inventor: **George Nelson,** 17 Vega St., New Britain, Conn. 06051

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[51] **Int. Cl.**[6] **A63B 69/00**

[52] **U.S. Cl.** ..... **273/1.5 A;** 273/396; 273/397; 273/401; 273/402

[58] **Field of Search** ..... 273/1.5 R, 1.5 A, 394, 273/395, 396, 397, 401, 402

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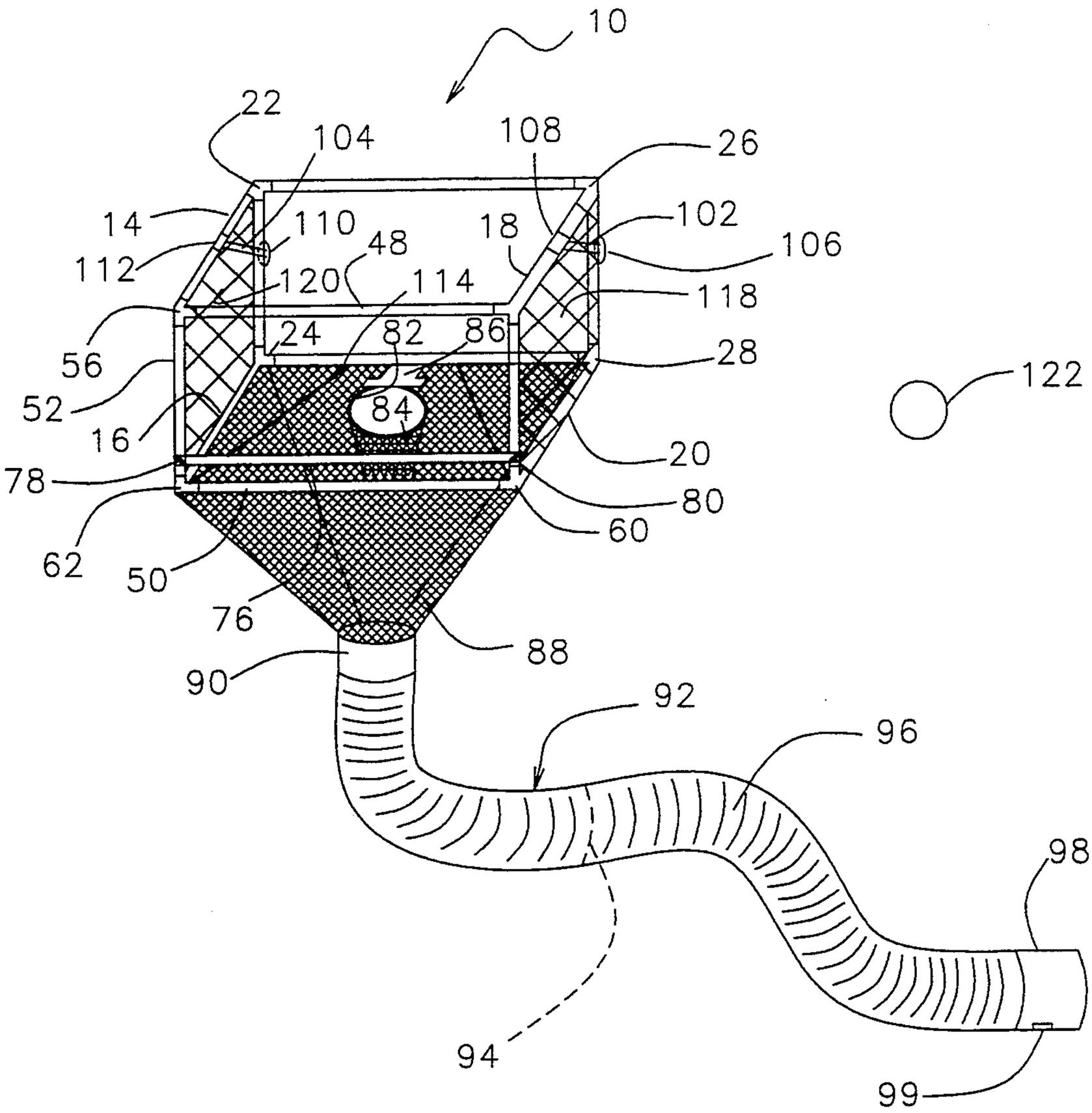
Primary Examiner—William H. Grieb

Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Handal & Morofsky

[57] **ABSTRACT**

A basketball practice system comprising a backboard made of a rigid or semi-rigid material and having a generally a planar configuration is disclosed. A frame structure is secured to the backboard and helps to support a guiding net configured and dimensioned to guide a basketball into a narrow port defined by the guiding net. Cross braces are secured between the frame structure and the backboard in order to give rigidity to the frame. Side deflection structure deflects balls which are moving to the left or right, away from the system and guiding them into the guiding net. This deflecting structure may comprise nets. A basketball net is positioned above the narrow port and a bendable tubular guiding member, which comprises a bendable tubular member has a spiral backbone and a skin secured to the spiral backbone, is coupled to the narrow port and configured to receive a ball and guide it toward a player using the inventive basketball practice system is disclosed.

20 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



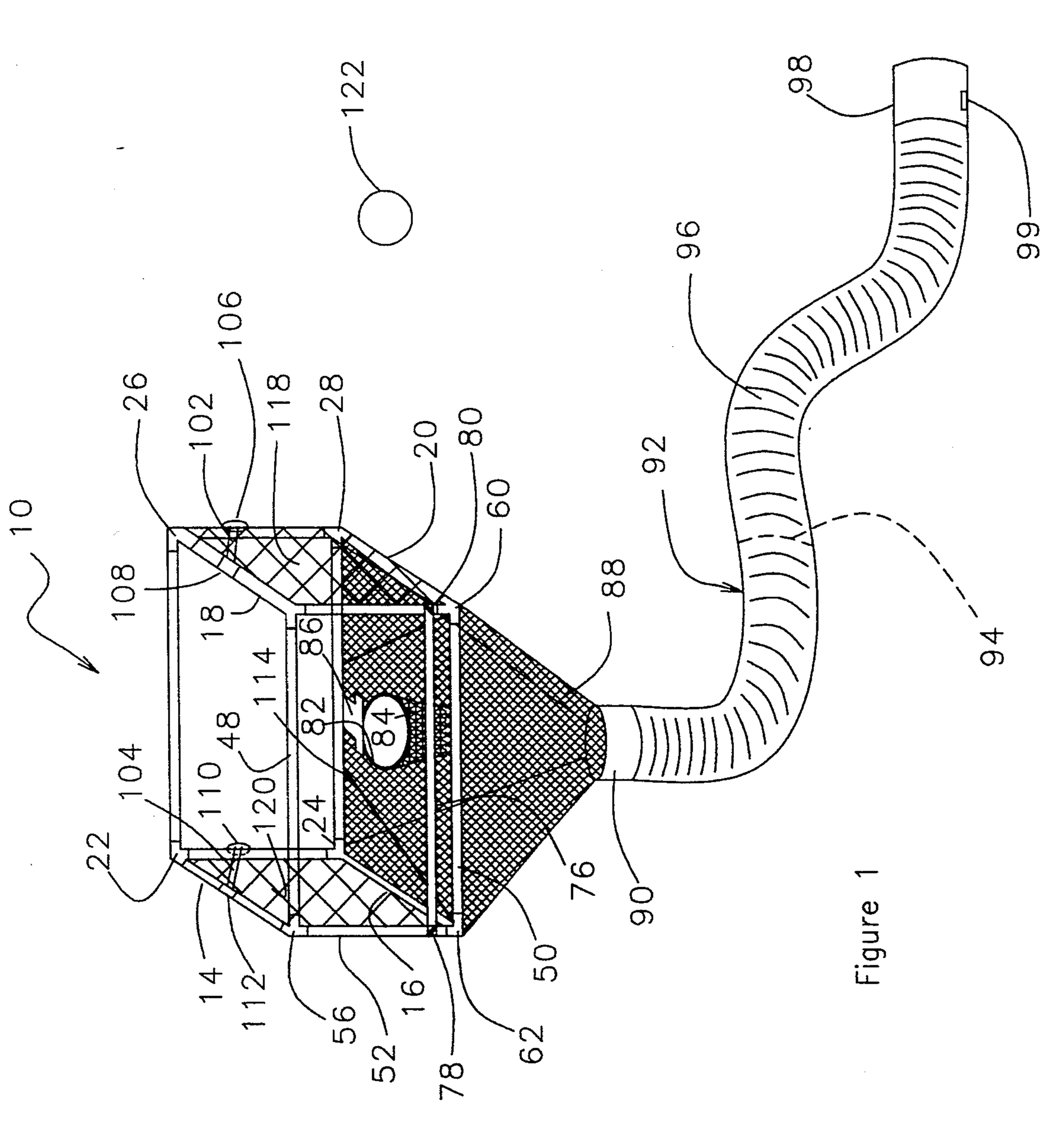

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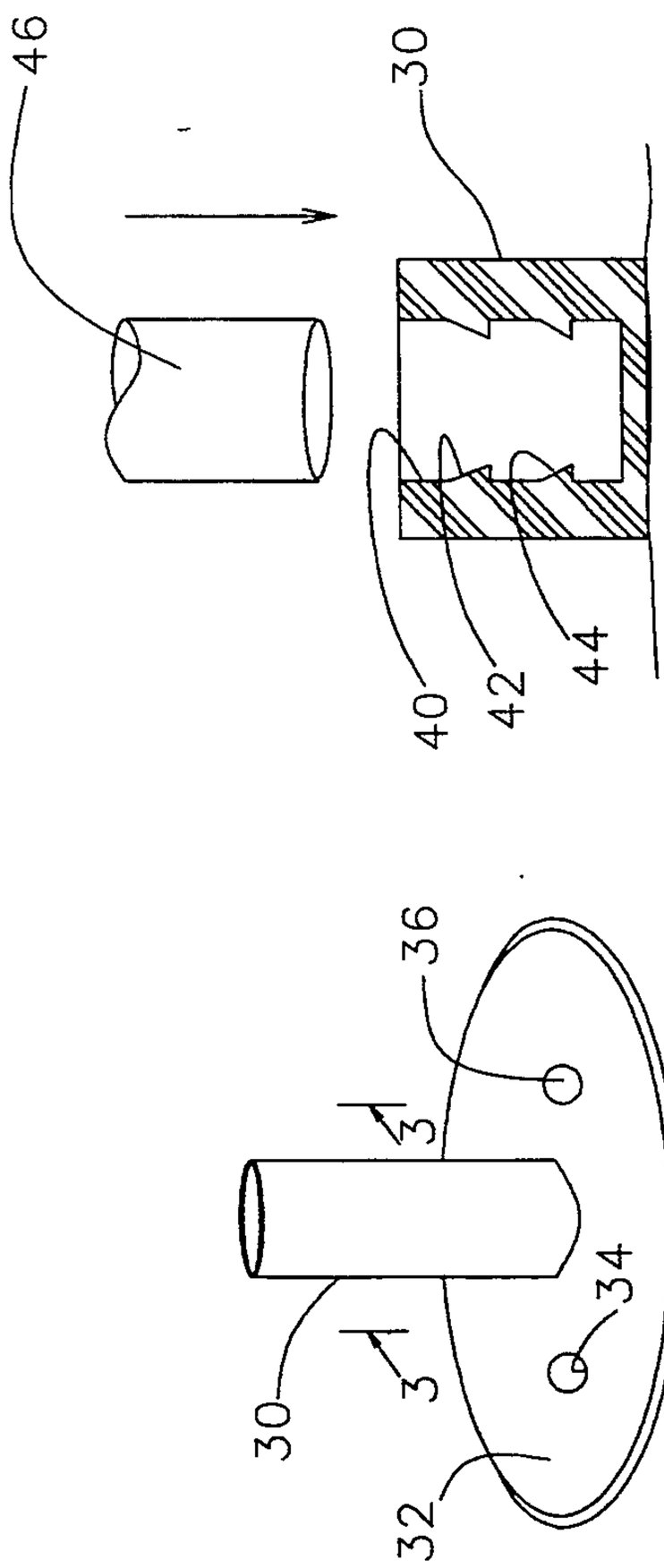
Figure 1



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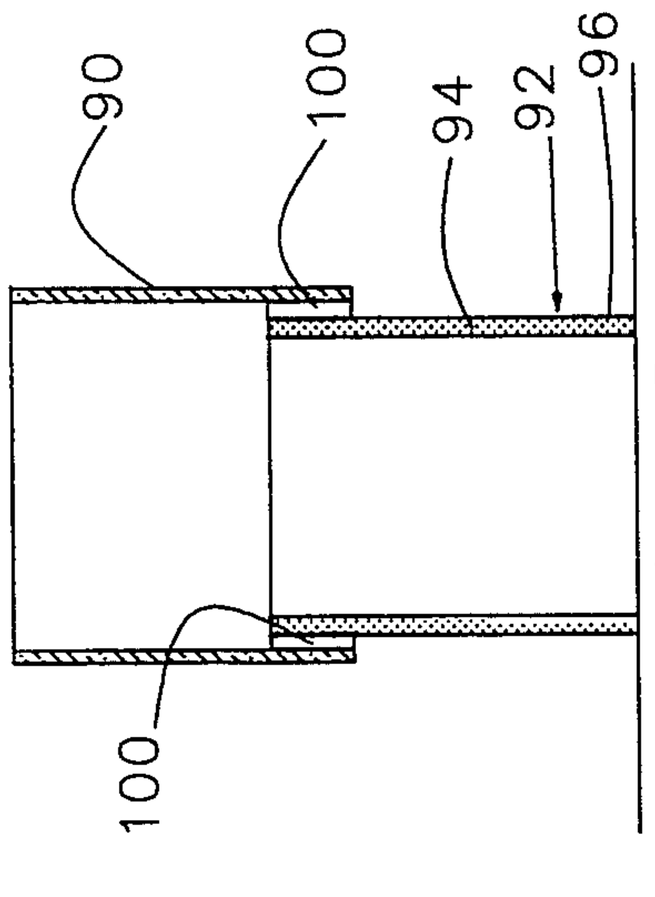

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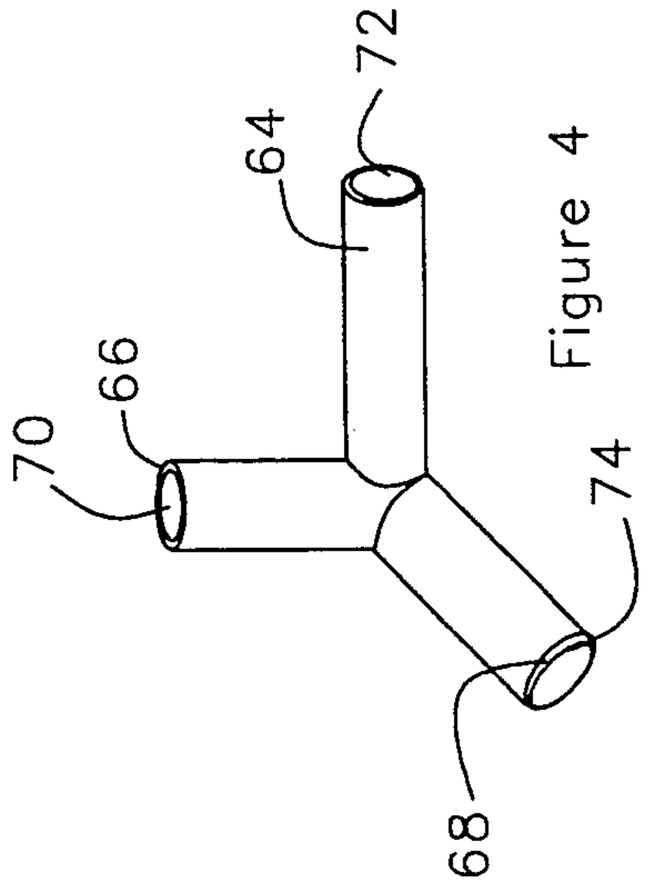

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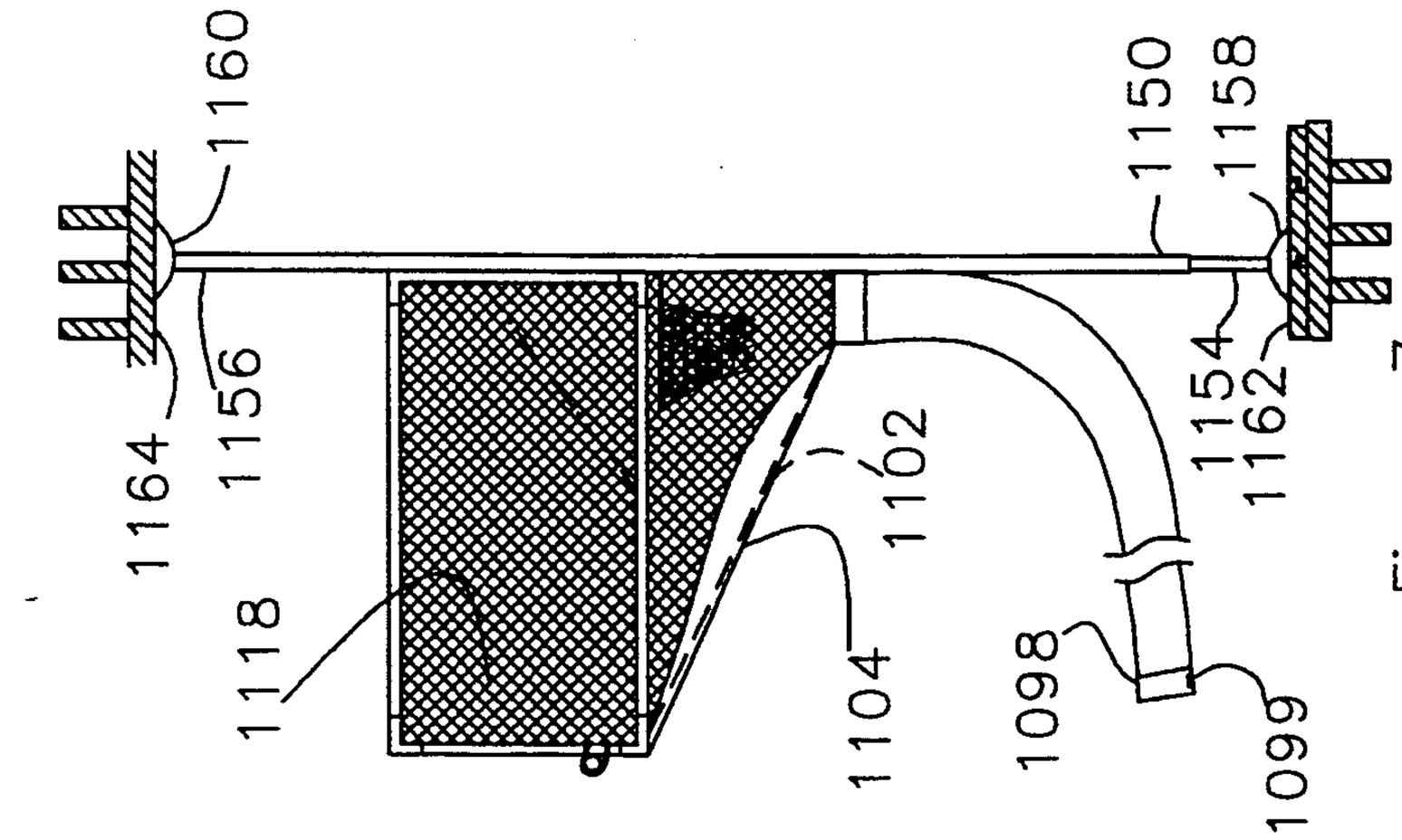

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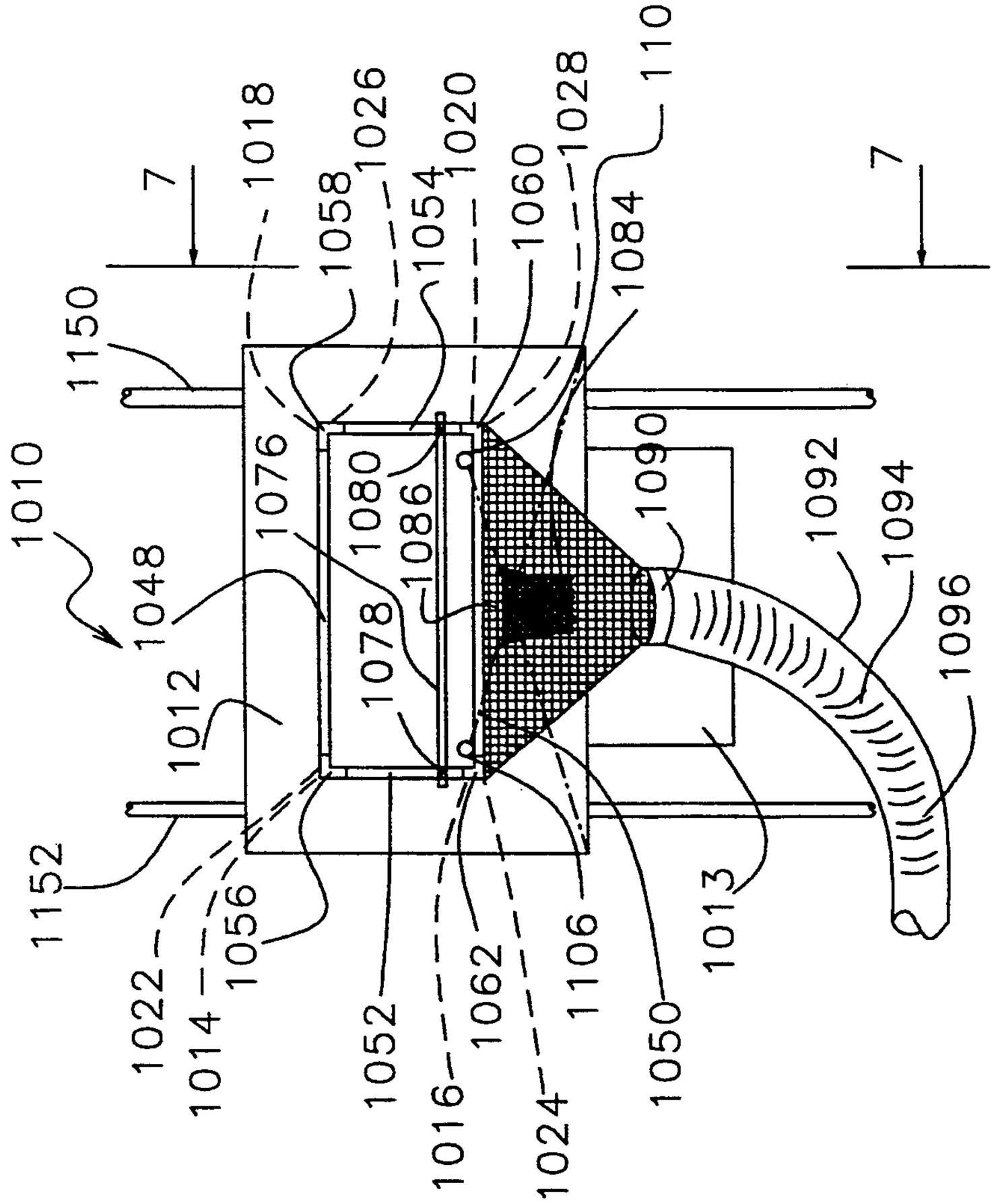

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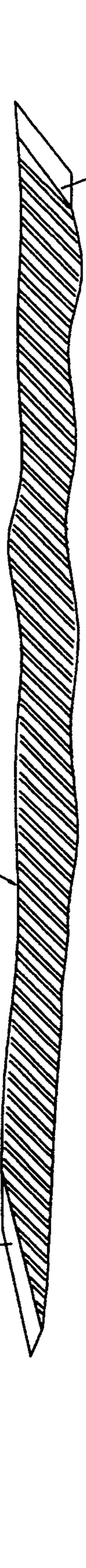

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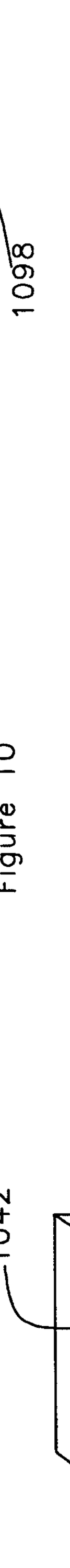
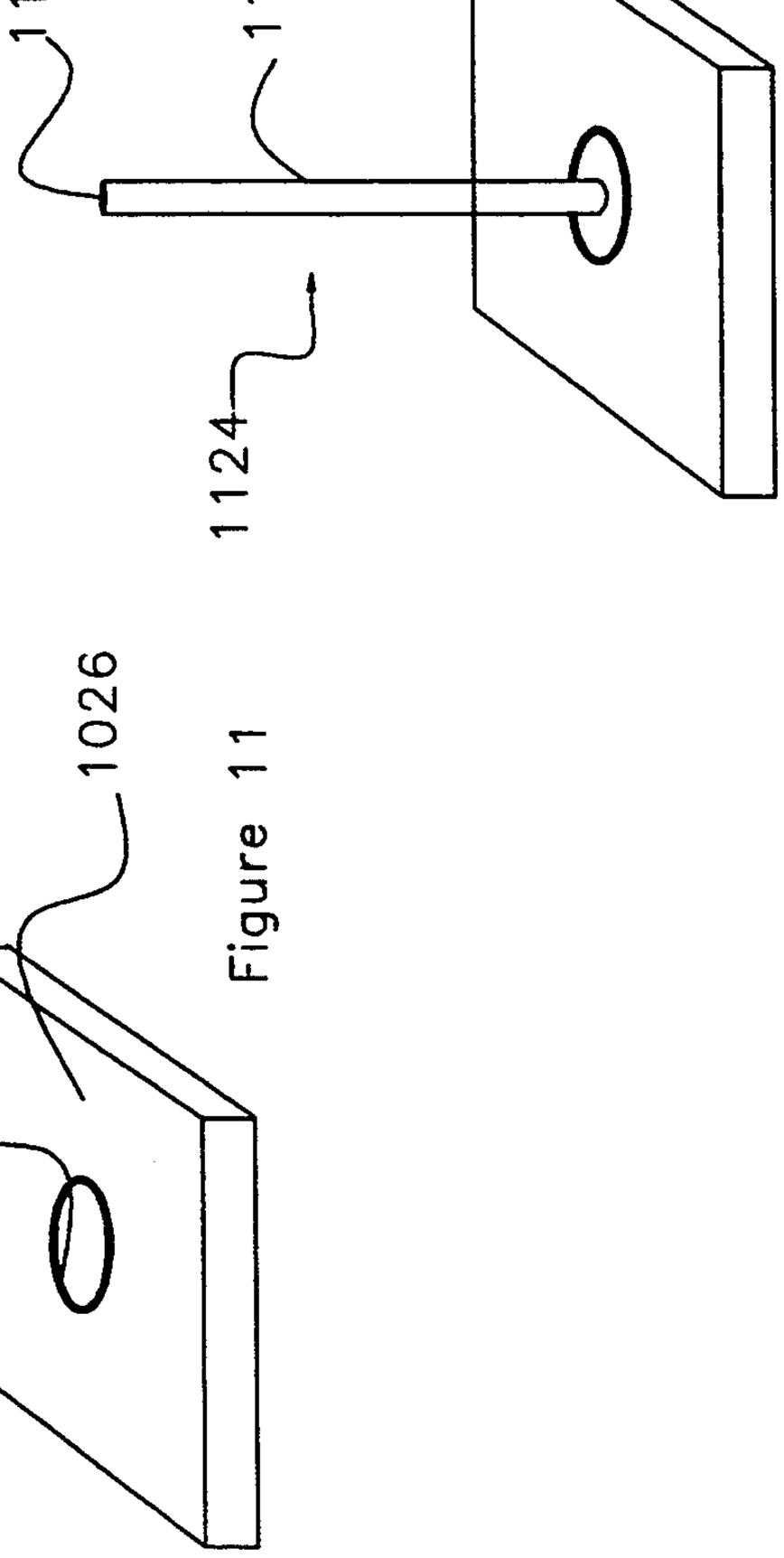


Figure 12

Figure 11



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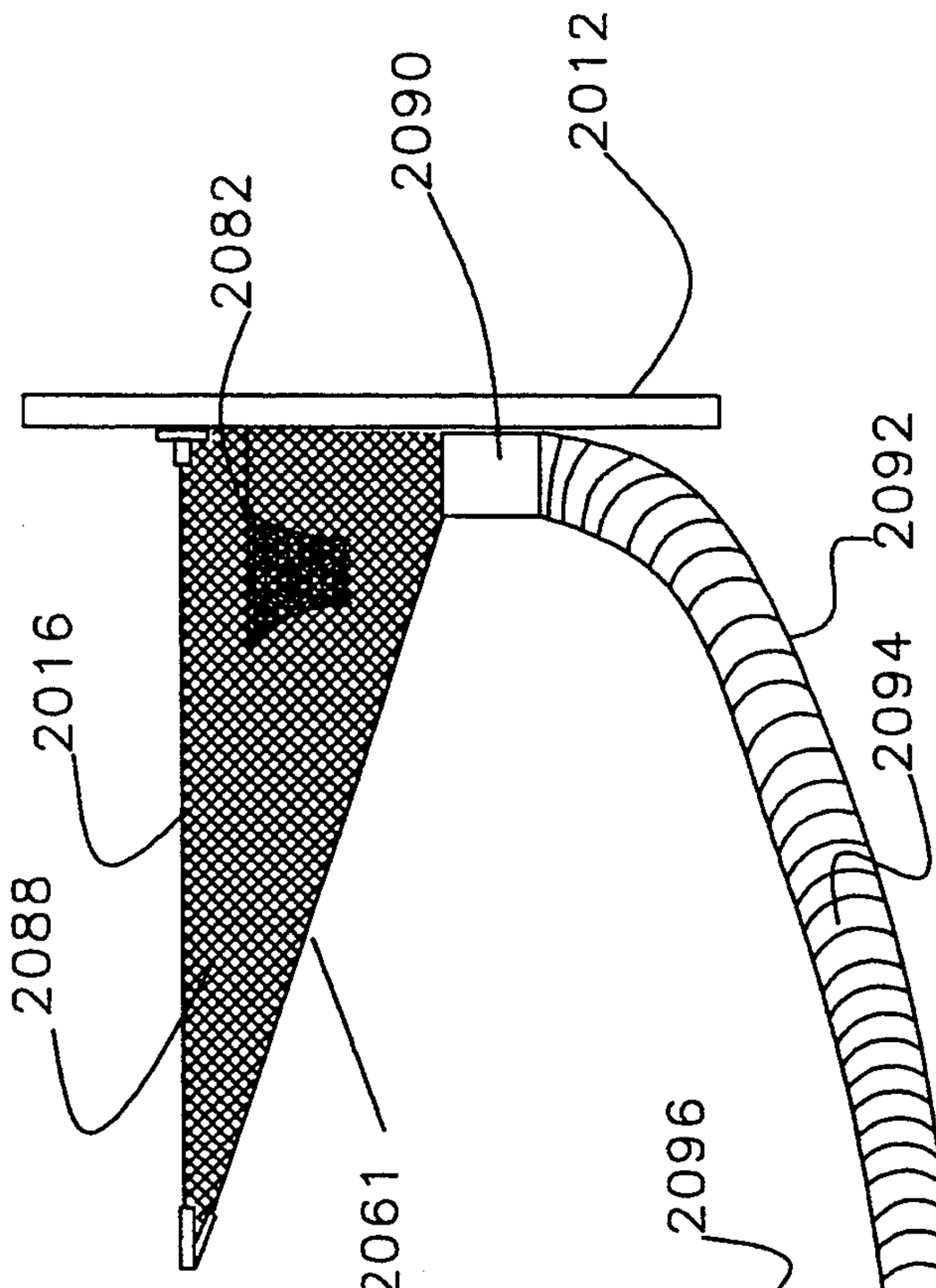

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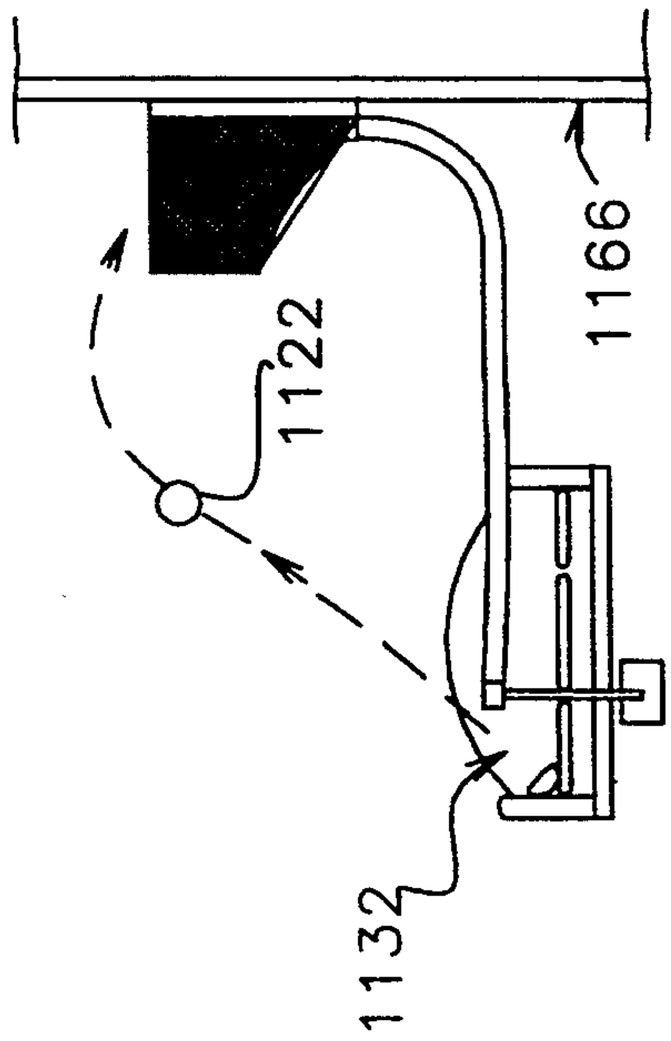

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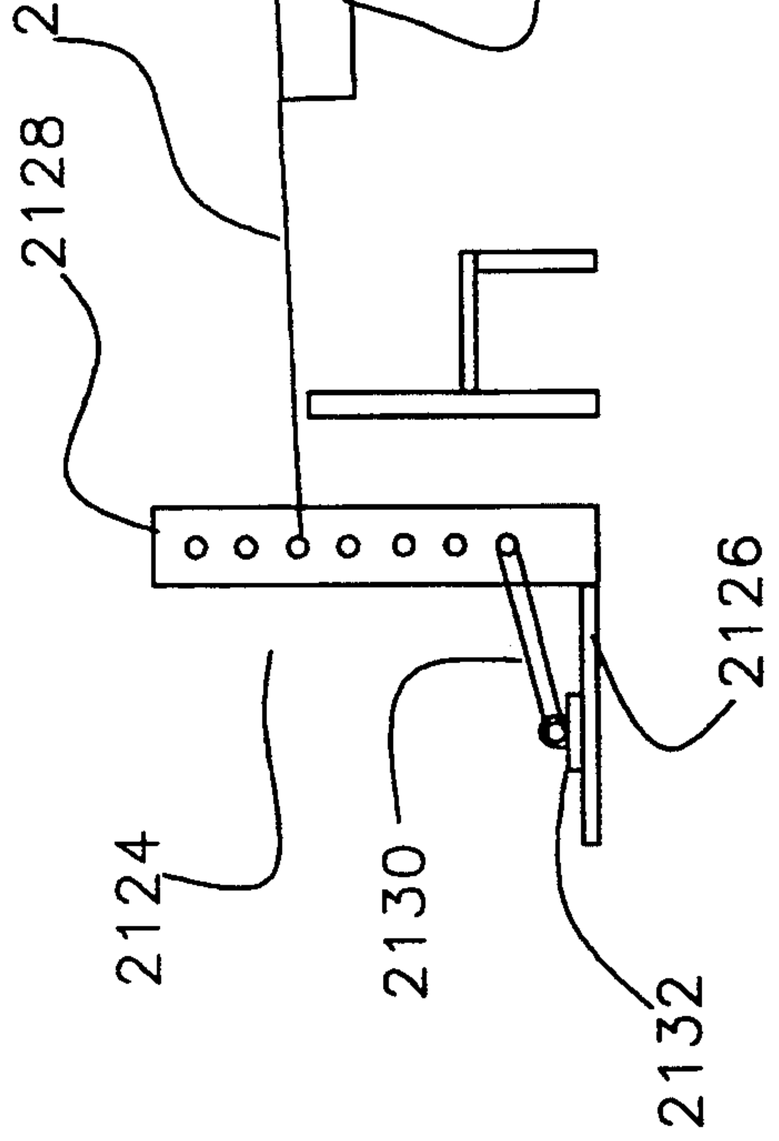

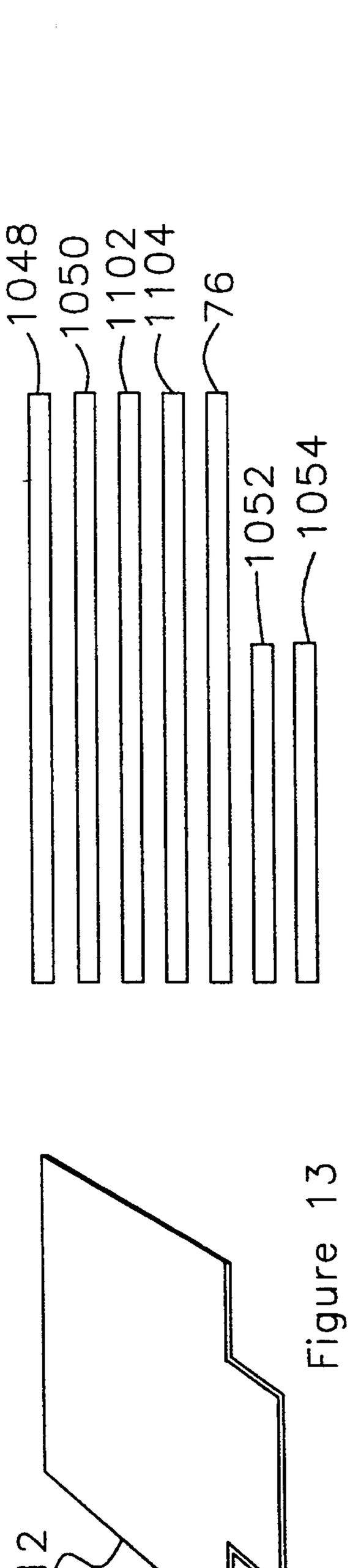

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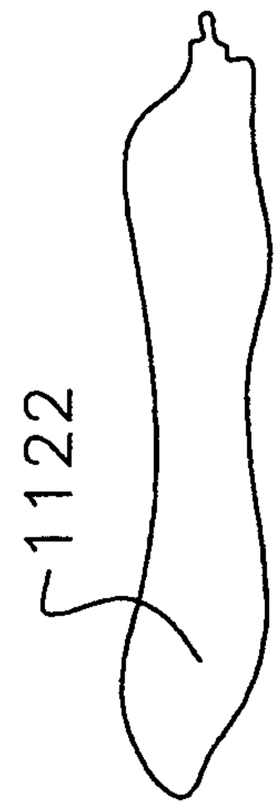

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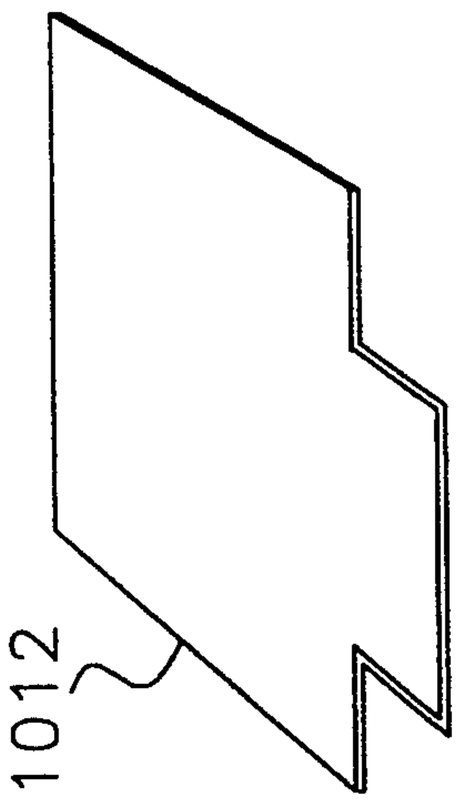

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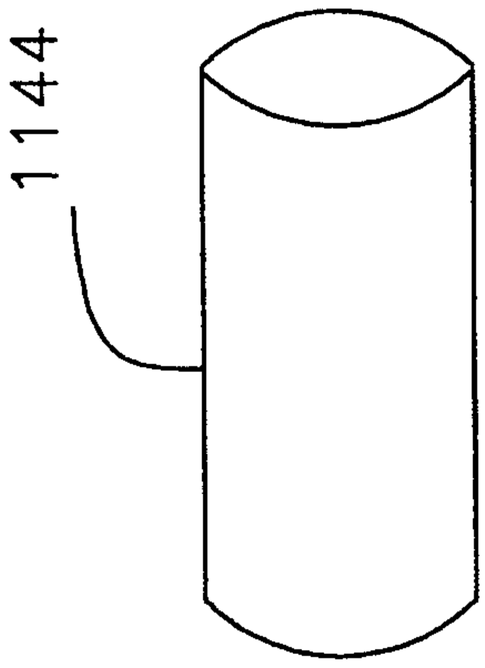

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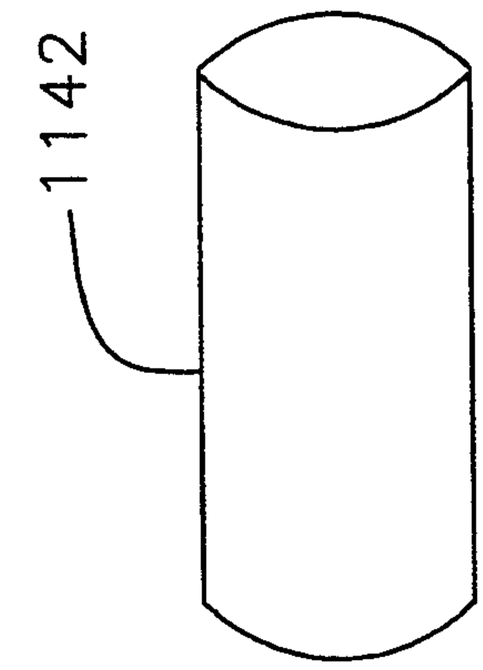
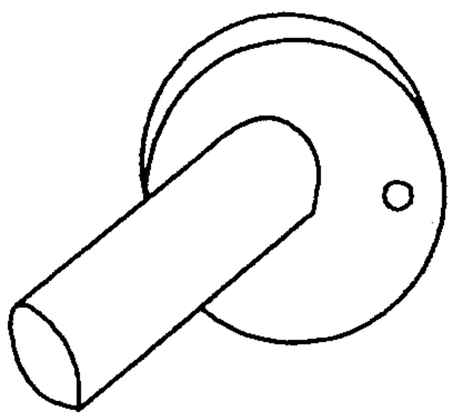


Figure 16



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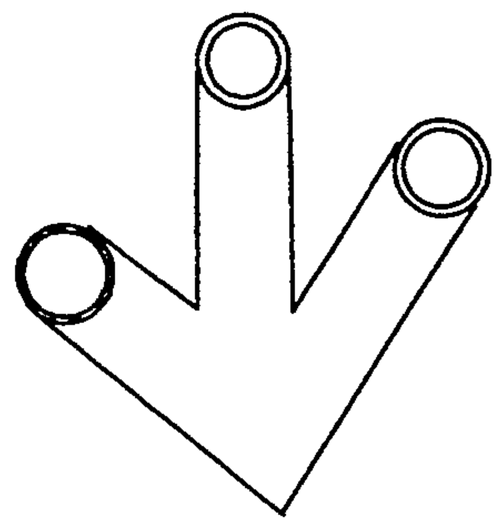

Figure 21

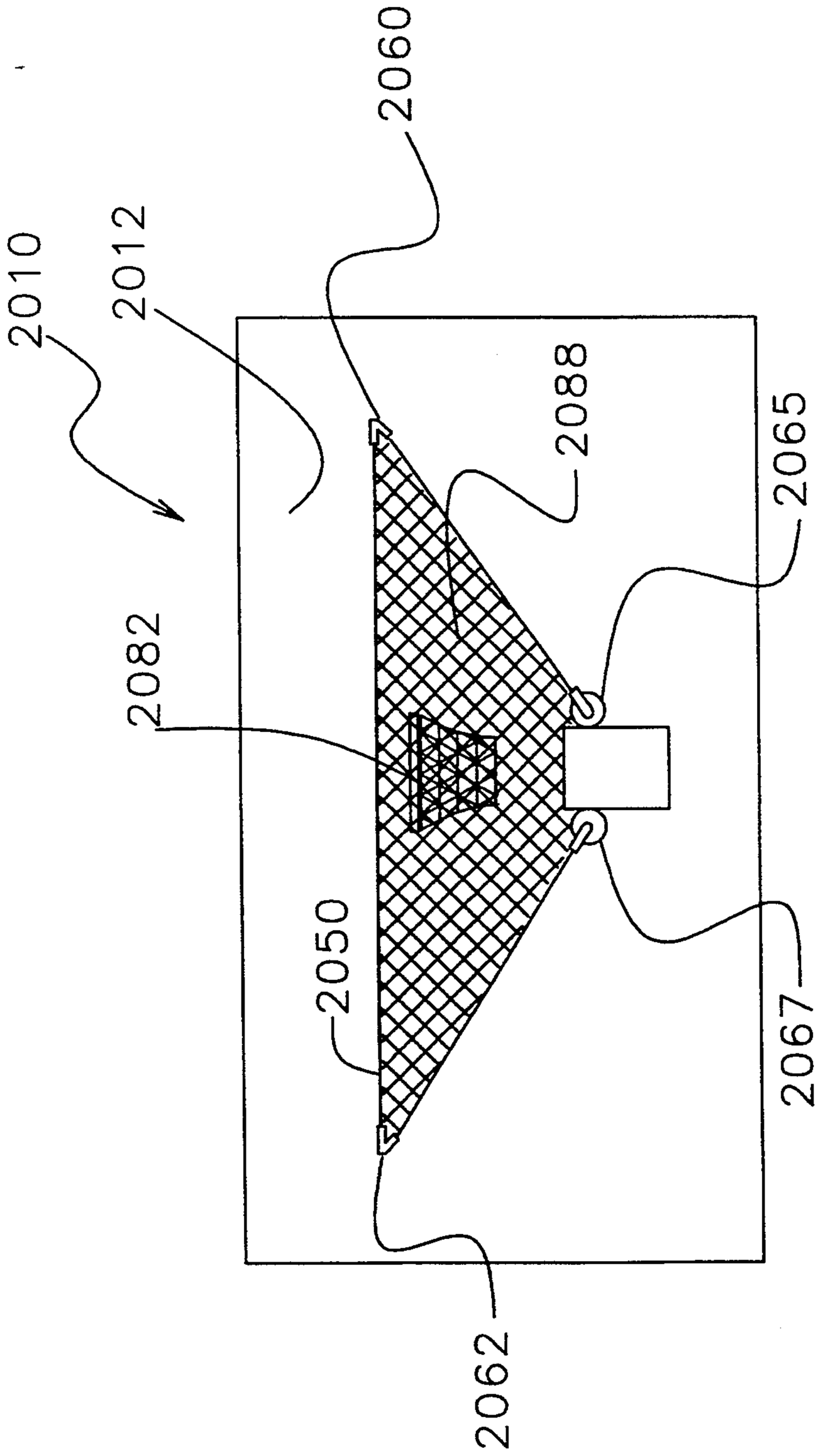

Figure 18

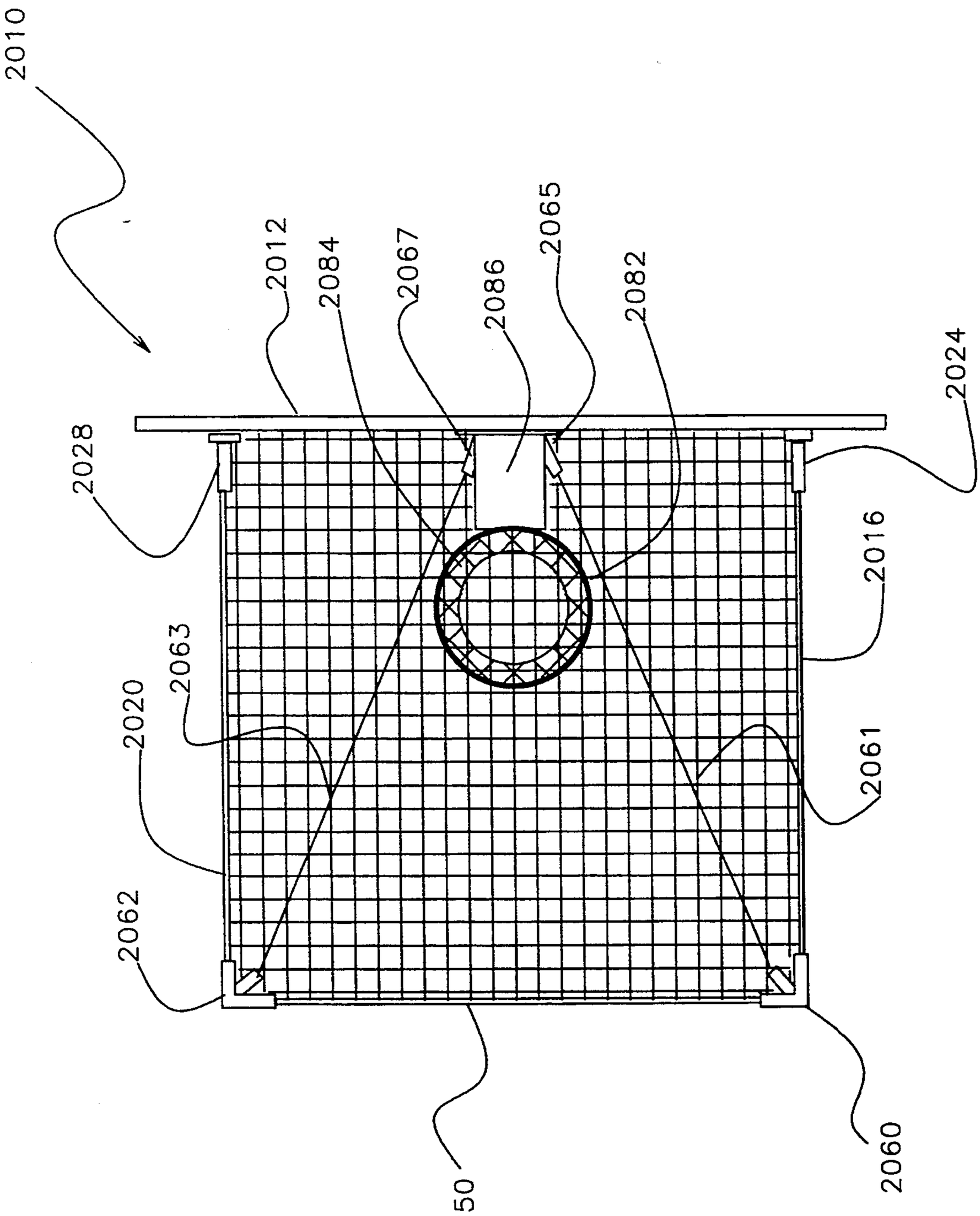
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Figure 20

INDOORS MINIATURE BASKETBALL PRACTICE APPARATUS

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to systems for providing practice for basketball tossing from a wide variety of possible positions and locations with automated return of the ball to the player.

BACKGROUND

One of the most popular participation sports in America today is basketball. Perhaps there is not a boy in America who has not grown-up without "shooting" baskets or playing in a more formalized team game setting. No wonder then that basketball has spawned such a plethora of related indoor and outdoor games. These range from miniature table top basketball shooting devices to electronic basketball video games and on through to such informal arrangements as shooting crumpled paper balls into waste baskets at the office. The present invention is concerned with devices which are more of the scale of this last type of system, more particularly, indoor devices of somewhat reduced scale but where the overall playing "field" is in the range of five to fifteen feet, or larger. More particularly, the present invention is concerned with systems of this type which also incorporate means for return of a basketball to the player.

As might be expected, there is no shortage of devices for returning balls to basketball players, in order to remove the need for a person, who is practicing alone, to go after and retrieve the ball after each shot. See for example U.S. Pat. No. 4,579,340 to Jenkins et al. in which a tubular net is placed underneath the basketball hoop and basket in order to capture the ball after it goes through the hoop and return it to an automatic shooting device incorporating a solenoid operated plunger. Presumably, this device would also accommodate practice by a number of players with the shooting mechanism being aimed periodically in different directions in response to appropriate control inputs.

However, systems such as those disclosed by Jenkins et al. suffer from numerous disadvantages and disabilities. First of all, the systems are electrically powered and must thus be positioned near a source of power or be dependant on battery power. In addition, the systems are large and cumbersome and incorporate power operated parts resulting in making them expensive and difficult to move around. In addition to these costs, it is almost impossible to put such devices into the mass market without substantial modifications in view of their bulk, cost, and the like. Finally, the Jenkins device suffers from the problem of not being able to return balls which miss the basket, thus rendering it of interest primarily only to professionals.

Many of these problems are addressed in other patents, such as U.S. Pat. No. 3,776,550 of MacNabb. In MacNabb, a very large net is provided underneath a full size basketball hoop and net. Support for a large collection net positioned underneath the basketball hoop and net is provided by a specialized custom made structure of variously shaped and multi-armed support tubes of relatively great cost.

In addition to the net in MacNabb for collecting basketballs which may have missed the basketball hoop, the system also includes a non-flexible chute for receiving the ball at the bottom of the collection net and returning it to the player in a fixed position.

Like many other relatively large sized systems, the MacNabb system is relative expensive to manufacture, cumbersome to put in place, and has a fixed structure which reduces the flexibility of the environment within which the system may be used. While in many circumstances (such as a basketball court) this may not be an important factor, in the context of home use, flexibility to configure the system in a wide variety of configurations is as important a factor as the cost of the system together with such other important factors as the ease with which it may be shipped, moved, stored and so forth. Systems such as MacNabb fail to substantially address any of these problems in a fashion which would render them advantageous for use in the home.

To a certain extent U.S. Pat. No. 5,183,253 to Grimaldi et al. addresses some of these problems. It incorporates a large oversized net for capturing missed basketballs. The net is formed with straight members and supported on a number of feet. For this reason, it is possible that this system can be made relatively compact, although his long tubular ball return members are not susceptible of being substantially reduced in size. In Grimaldi, the collection net which is disposed beneath the basketball hoop is of relatively large size, in order to accommodate the possibility of the basketball missing the backboard, or hitting the backboard or the hoop in an unusual angle, resulting in a relatively large deviation in its path from the region proximately surrounding the basketball hoop. However, Grimaldi et al. like MacNabb, is a relatively fixed system taking up a large area and therefore requiring a large area in the home, if it is to be used, even in a somewhat reduced scale version. In addition, because Grimaldi uses simple dowels as his support members, the system suffers from rigidity problems insofar as forces tend to be concentrated at the joinder of the various dowel members or dowels. Finally, Grimaldi et al. suffers from the problem of having a fixed configuration and not one which may be readily adapted to fit a wide variety of environments with different obstacles creating various space requirements.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with the present invention, the obvious failings of these prior art systems is addressed in economical and effective fashion to produce a miniaturized basketball practice device whose dimensions are on the same order of magnitude as the room in which it is placed. At the same time, this is achieved while providing for the flexibility of accommodating a wide range of room furniture arrangements and environments, without the necessity of rearranging furniture in order to accommodate the system. At the same time, the system may be compressed into an extremely small size and easily transported either for merchandizing or for storage in the home. At the same time, the cost of the system is extremely low, using largely existing standard structural elements, albeit that they are taken from different areas of technology. Finally, the system achieves all of the above while at the same time providing a high degree of structural rigidity.

More particularly, in accordance with the present invention, a basketball practice system comprising a backboard made of a rigid or semi-rigid material and having a generally a planar configuration is provided. A frame structure is secured to the backboard and helps to support a guiding net configured and dimensioned to

guide a basketball into a narrow port defined by the guiding net. Side deflection structure deflects balls which are moving to the left or right, away from the system and guiding them into the guiding net. This deflecting structure may comprise nets. A basketball net is positioned above the narrow port and a bendable tubular guiding member is coupled to the narrow port and configured to receive a ball and guide it toward a player using the inventive basketball practice system.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment the system further comprises a plurality of cross braces secured between the frame structure and the backboard in order to give rigidity to the frame. The tubular guiding member is secured to the backboard at a position on the tubular guiding member proximate to the narrow port. The tubular guiding member comprises a cylindrical member secured to the end of the tubular guiding member and proximate to the narrow port, the tubular member is being secured to the backboard. The bendable tubular member has a spiral backbone and a skin secured to the spiral backbone.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

One way of carrying out the invention is described in detail below with reference to drawings which illustrate only one specific embodiment of the invention and in which:

FIG. **1** is a view of a indoor basketball shooting system constructed in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. **2** is a view of a bracket useful in the structure illustrated in FIG. **1**;

FIG. **3** is a cross-sectional detail of the bracket illustrated in FIG. **2**;

FIG. **4** is an illustration of a corner support type bracket useful in the embodiment of FIG. **1**;

FIG. **5** illustrates the construction of the tubular guiding member used in FIG. **1**;

FIG. **6** is an alternative embodiment of the invention;

FIG. **7** is a view along lines 7—7 of FIG. **6**;

FIG. **8** is a view of a support for supporting the end of the system proximate a player to enable easy ball retrieval;

FIG. **9** illustrates the system of the present invention in use;

FIGS. **10–17** illustrates the various parts of the invention and their facility for being packaged as a flat shipping unit;

FIG. **18** is a front view of the net portion of a second alternative embodiment of the invention;

FIG. **19** is a side view of the invention shown in FIG. **18** including, a conduit support stand;

FIG. **20** is a top view of the embodiment shown in FIG. **18**;

FIG. **21** illustrates a corner bracket used in the embodiment shown in FIG. **18**; and

FIG. **22** illustrates a diagonal dowel bracket used in the embodiment shown in FIG. **18**.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

Referring to FIG. **1**, a basketball practice system **10** constructed in accordance with the present invention is illustrated. System **10** comprises a rigid plywood backboard **12** of generally rectangular shape which may be mounted on a wall using any suitable means. Backboard **12** may also be made of Masonite, particle board or any other suitable substantially rigid material, having a thickness in the range between $\frac{1}{8}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ of one inch, typically. Of course, other materials may be used in varying thicknesses as long as they provide a measure of rigidity to system **10**.

Horizontal dowels **14**, **16**, **18**, and **20** are mounted on backboard **12** using a plurality of respective brackets **22**, **24**, **26**, and **28**, as illustrated in FIG. **1**. Brackets **22–28** are of the type which include a base for attaching to backboard **12** and a tubular receiving neck for receiving a dowel. Such a bracket is illustrated in FIG. **2**. A tubular receiving neck **30** is integral with a base **32** which includes a pair of screw receiving holes **34** and **36** for receiving screws and screwing the bracket **38** to backboard **12**. The neck **30** of the brackets includes a dowel receiving passage **40** which has a pair of annular ribs **42** and **44**, on the inside, for engaging a dowel, such as dowel **46**, as illustrated in FIG. **3**. The brackets may be made of plastic, artificial rubber, or any suitable material with the size of the ribs being increased for more flexible materials in order to insure a tighter grip of the dowel when it is inserted in the neck of its respective bracket.

As can be seen most clearly in FIG. **1**, a rectangular box shape is further defined by a pair of long horizontal dowels **48** and **50** and a pair of short vertical dowels **52** and **54**. The dowel structures are maintained in position by plurality of corner brackets **56**, **58**, **60**, and **62** which take the configuration illustrated in FIG. **4**. These corner brackets, each have a plurality of necks **64**, **66**, and **68** which define passages **70**, **72**, and **74**, respectively. The passages **70–74** have ribs substantially identical to ribs **42** and **44**, illustrated in FIG. **3**.

Referring back to FIG. **1**, rebound ball retaining dowel **76** is maintained in position by a pair of rubber bands **78** and **80** which secure dowel **76** to short vertical dowels **52** and **54**, respectively. A hoop **82** with an associated basket net **84** are maintained in place by a support **86** which is secured to backboard **12**.

Balls shot by the player, are collected by a funnel shaped net **88** which has an output coupled to a tubular coupling member **90**, which may be a simple cylinder of metal or section of metal tubing. Coupling **90** is in turn coupled to a length of compressible bendable air conditioner or heating conduit **92**, which is of the construction which incorporates a spiral metal rib **94** which acts as a support for an outer casing **96** made of fibrous material, reinforced foil or similar material.

Casing **96**, is, in turn, attached to an end coupler **98**. Couplings **90** and **98** are attached to conduit **92** by a quantity of silicon caulking compound **100** or other similar material as is illustrated in FIG. **5**. In accordance with the preferred embodiment, it is expected that couplings **90** and **98** will be made of plastic or, if desired, metal. Coupling **98** is provided with a mounting member **99** which allows it to be attached to a piece of furniture using a VELCRO brand type fastener or any other suitable fastener. Finally, rigidity to the system is provided by a plurality of diagonal braces **102** and **104**, which are made of dowels which are maintained in place by brackets **106**, **108**, **110**, and **112** respectively. Finally, an additional measure of rigidity is provided by a pair of taut rope lines **114** and **116**. Balls bouncing towards the side are guided into funnel shape net **88** by a pair of side nets **118** and **120**.

During use, balls are tossed from a remote position into the cube defined by the dowel members, perhaps causing them to bounce against backboard **12** and fall through hoop **82**, or fall around hoop **82** into funnel

shaped net **88**. Dowel **76** may be adjusted in position to ensure that balls rebounding off backboard **12** do not fall to the front of net **88**. The position of the dowel **76** is easily maintained by rubber bands **78** and **80** and may simply be slid to the desired position where it will be held by the taut rubber bands.

After a ball **122** is thrown, it falls into coupling **90** and is conveyed through conduit **92** to a location remote from the net at which coupling **98** is located. Here it may be caught by the player, who then simply shoots another basket without the necessity of retrieving the basketball.

An alternative embodiment is illustrated in FIGS. **6–8**. Generally, similar parts or parts performing analogous, corresponding or identical functions to those of the FIG. **1** embodiment are numbered herein with numbers which differ from those of the earlier embodiment by multiple of one thousand.

Referring in particular to FIG. **6**, a basketball practice system **1010** having certain characteristics in common with the system of the earlier embodiment is illustrated. Support for the system is provided by a backboard **1012**. Backboard **1012** has an extension **1013** integral with it. In turn, backboard **1012** supports a plurality of dowels. In particular, horizontal dowels **1014**, **1016**, **1018**, and **1020** are mounted on backboard **1012** using a plurality of respective brackets **1022**, **1024**, **1026**, and **1028**, as illustrated in FIGS. **6–7**. Brackets **1022–28** are of the type which include a base for attaching to backboard **1012** and a tubular receiving neck for receiving a dowel. The bracket illustrated in FIG. **2** may be used. A rectangular box is further defined by a pair of long horizontal dowels **1048** and **1050** and a pair of short vertical dowels **1052** and **1054**. The dowel structures are kept together by a plurality of corner brackets **1056**, **1058**, **1060**, and **1062** which take the structure illustrated in FIG. **4**.

A rebound ball retaining dowel **1076** is maintained in position by a pair of rubber bands **1078** and **1080** which secure dowel **1076** to short vertical dowels **1052** and **1054** respectively. A hoop **1082** with an associated basket net **1084** is maintained in place by a support **1086** which is secured to backboard **1012**.

Shots by the player, are collected by a funnel shaped net **1088** which has an output coupled to a tubular coupling member **1090**, which may be a simple cylinder of metal or plastic, or section of metal tubing. Coupling **1090** is secured to backboard **1012** and is, in turn, coupled to a length of compressible bendable air conditioner or heating conduit **1092**. Conduit **1092** is of a construction which incorporates a spiral metal rib **1094** which acts as a support for an outer casing **1096** made of paper, foil or similar material. Casing **1096**, is, in turn, attached to an end coupler **1098**. Couplings **1090** and **1098** are attached to conduit **1092**.

In accordance with the preferred embodiment, it is expected that couplings **1090** and **1098** will be made of plastic or, if desired, metal. Coupling **1098** is provided with a mounting member **1099** which allows it to be attached to a piece of furniture using a VELCRO brand fastener or any other suitable fastener. Alternatively, member **1099** may be attached to a stand **1124** comprising a base **1126**, vertical support pole **1128** and VELCRO mating member **1130**. Finally, rigidity to the system is provided by a plurality of diagonal braces **1102** and **1104**, which are made of dowels which are maintained in place by brackets **1106**, and **1108**. Balls bouncing towards the side are guided into funnel shaped net **1088** by a pair of side nets **1118** and **1120**.

As illustrated in FIG. **9**, during use, balls are tossed by the player **1132** from a remote position into the cube defined by the dowel members, perhaps causing them to bounce against backboard **1012** and fall through hoop **1082** or fall around hoop **1082** into funnel shaped net **1088**. Dowel **1076** may be adjusted in position to ensure that balls **1122** rebounding off backboard **1012** do not fall to the front of net **1088**. After a ball **1122** is thrown, it falls into coupling **1090** and is conveyed through conduit **1092** to remote location at which coupling **1098** is located where it may be caught by the player, who then simply shoots another basket without the necessity of retrieving the basketball.

As can be seen most clearly in FIG. **7**, the system may be mounted between floor and ceiling using a pair of spring mounted vertical supports **1150** and **1152**. The supports generally have spring loaded gripping feet **1154** and **1156** which incorporate rubber cups **1158** and **1160** which enable them to be secured, to floor **1162** and ceiling **1164**, thus providing for a secure support of the backboard **1012** which is secured to the vertical members **1150** and **1152** by any appropriate structure. Alternatively, the system may be supported by having the backboard nailed or put on a picture hook secured to a wall **1166** as illustrated in FIG. **9**.

Referring in particular to FIG. **18**, a basketball practice system **2010** having certain characteristics in common with the system of the earlier embodiment is illustrated. Support for the system is provided by a backboard **2012**. Backboard **2012** has an extension **2013** integral with it. In turn, backboard **2012** supports a plurality of dowels. In particular, horizontal dowels **2016** and **2020** are mounted on backboard **2012** using respective brackets **2024** and **2028**, as illustrated in FIGS. **18–20**. Brackets **2024** and **2028** are of the type which include a base for attaching to backboard **2012** and a tubular receiving neck for receiving a dowel. The bracket illustrated in FIG. **2** may be used.

An additional horizontal dowel **2050** extends in a parallel direction to the backboard **2012** between dowels **2016** and **2020**. Diagonal dowels **2061** and **2063** extend diagonally upward from the backboard **2012** to the intersections of horizontal dowels **2016** and **2050** and horizontal dowels **2020** and **2050**, respectively. The diagonal dowels **2061** and **2063** are fastened to the backboard **2012** via brackets **2065** and **2067**, as illustrated in FIGS. **18–22**, particularly FIG. **22**. The brackets **2065** and **2067** include a base for engaging the backboard **2012** and an angularly extending tubing for engaging the diagonal dowels. The dowel intersection including dowels **2061**, **2016** and **2050** and the intersection including dowels **2063**, **2020** and **2050** are secured together by corner brackets **2060** and **2062**, respectively, illustrated in FIG. **21**. The brackets **2060** and **2062** each include two perpendicularly aligned tubes and a diagonal tube extending from the intersection of the same.

A hoop **2082** with an associated basket net **2084** is maintained in place by a support **2086** which is secured to backboard **2012**. The hoop **2082** is positioned on the vertical centerline of the backboard **2012** approximately five inches downward from the top edge of the horizontal dowel **2050**.

Shots by the player, are collected by a wedge shaped net formation **2088** comprised of three triangularly shaped nets fastened at their edges and extending between the horizontal and diagonal dowels and back-

board as shown in FIGS. **18–20**. The three triangularly shaped portions are formed and bordered by dowels **2016, 2061** and backboard **2012**; dowels **2050, 2063** and **2061**; and dowels **2020, 2063** and backboard **2012**. The netting can be fastened to the dowels and backboard via adhesive or any other suitable means. The net formation **2088** has an output coupled to a tubular coupling member **2090**.

The coupling **2090** may be a simple cylinder of metal or plastic, or section of metal tubing. Coupling **2090** is secured to backboard **2012** and is, in turn, coupled to a length of compressible bendable air conditioner or heating conduit **2092**. Conduit **2092** is of a construction which incorporates a spiral metal rib **2094** which acts as a support for an outer casing **2096** made of paper, foil or similar material. Casing **2096**, is, in turn, attached at its other end to a rope **2097** used to secure the casing to a stand. Casing **2096** is also attached to a coupler **2098** and couplings **2090** and **2098** are attached to conduit **2092**.

In accordance with the preferred embodiment, it is expected that couplings **2090** and **2098** will be made of plastic or, if desired, metal. Coupling **2098** can be provided with a mounting member, as in the FIG. **6** embodiment, which allows it to be attached to a piece of furniture using a Velcro brand fastener or any other suitable fastener. Preferably, however, for this embodiment, a string **2097** can be used for attaching member **2092** and coupling **2098** to a stand **2124**, shown in FIG. **19**, comprised of a base **2126** and vertical support pole **2128** having holes therethrough for engaging the string **2097**.

Rigidity to the stand is provided by several diagonal braces, a first brace **2130** and a second brace not shown, extending downwardly from the vertical pole **2128** to the base **2126**. The braces are made of dowels and are maintained in place on the base by a first bracket **2132** secured to the base, shown in FIG. **19**, and second bracket, not shown, similar to the first bracket. The braces are connected via pins or the like to a lower hole of the vertical support pole **2128**. Also, the stand **2124** has a rectangularly shaped base **2126** comprising the bottom end thereof. The base lies flat on a surface and is large enough to fit a chair thereon, as shown in FIG. **20**.

The system is used similarly to the system illustrated in FIG. **9**, wherein, during use, balls are tossed from a remote position into the rectangular opening defined by the dowel members **2016, 2020** and **2050**, perhaps causing them to bounce against backboard **2012** and fall through hoop **2082** or fall around hoop **2082** into wedge shaped net formation **2088**. For this embodiment, the remote position is a chair positioned on the base **2126** which acts as a sitting place and also a manner for securing the base and stand in place. By positioning the hoop **2082** lower than a top edge of the rectangular opening defined by the dowels, a deflection structure is inherently formed wherein the wedge shaped net formation extending over the hoop **2082** is used to deflect the ball inwardly on odd bounces. After a ball **2122** is thrown, it falls into coupling **2090** and is conveyed through conduit **2092** to the remote location, the chair, at which coupling **2098** is located where it may be caught by the player, who then simply shoots another basket without the necessity of retrieving the basketball.

The system **2010** may be mounted in a manner similar to the FIG. **6** embodiment of the system as shown in FIG. **7** for the FIG. **6** embodiment. Alternatively, the system may be supported by having the backboard nailed or put on a picture hook secured to a wall **1166** as illustrated in FIG. **9** for the FIG. **6** embodiment.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

The present invention is particularly suitable for application to modern distribution methods. As an example representative of the embodiments disclosed, the inventive system **1010** may be easily packaged in a relatively flat container or mounted on backboard **1012** and blister packaged. As can be seen in FIG. **10**, conduit **1092** for guiding the balls back toward the user may be compressed and slanted diagonally. Couplings **1090** and **1098** may be made of relatively short length on the order of two centimeters, thus facilitating their being compressed into a small size.

As shown in FIG. **11**, support **1124** may be broken down into a flat base **1126** and a pole **1128** which is provided with threads **1140** which mate with threads in a taped hole **1142** in base **1126**. As can be seen in FIG. **13**, backboard **1012** is a flat member and, in the context of blister packaging may take the place of the cardboard card normally used in such packaging techniques. As illustrated in FIG. **14**, the various dowels which comprise the system are also of relatively small size and can be packaged in the desired flat container. If desired, even ball **1122** may be deflated for such packaging as shown in FIG. **15**. Finally, a plurality of brackets may be packaged in a plastic envelope **1142**, as illustrated in FIG. **16** and the net packaged in another plastic envelope **1144**, as illustrated in FIG. **17**. These elements, together with the other elements illustrated in FIGS. **10–12** and **14–1**, may be disposed over and blister packaged to the backboard illustrated in FIG. **13**.

While an illustrative embodiment of the invention has been described above, it is, of course, understood that various modifications will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art. Such modifications are within the spirit and scope of the invention, which is limited and defined only by the appended claims.

I claim:

1. A ball shooting practice system, comprising:

a) a backboard made of a substantially rigid material;

b) a tapered guiding member having a wide input port and a narrow output, said tapered guiding member being configured and dimensioned to guide a ball into said narrow output;

c) a self-supporting deflection structure for deflecting balls, which are moving away from the system, and guiding them into said tapered guiding member;

d) a ball target positioned above said narrow output; and

e) a bendable tubular guiding member coupled to said narrow output and configured to receive said ball and guide it toward a player using said ball practice system.

2. A ball shooting practice system as in claim **1**, wherein said deflection structure comprise netting.

3. A ball shooting practice system as in claim **1**, wherein said bendable tubular guiding member is secured to said backboard at a position on said bendable tubular guiding member proximate to said narrow output.

4. A ball shooting practice system as in claim **3**, wherein said bendable tubular guiding member comprises a cylindrical member secured to the end of said bendable tubular guiding member and proximate to said narrow output, and wherein said bendable tubular guiding member is secured to said backboard.

5. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 3, further comprises a frame structure secured to said backboard wherein said frame structure comprising a plurality of cross braces secured between said frame structure and said backboard in order to give rigidity to said frame.

6. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 5, wherein the end of said bendable tubular guiding member opposite the end, proximate to said narrow output has a fastener secured proximate to said end, whereby said fastener may be secured at a position convenient to the user.

7. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 5, wherein said ball target is positioned below the top of said tapered guiding member.

8. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 5, further comprising a vertical support member with a mating fastener for mating with a fastener which is secured to the end of said bendable tubular guiding member opposite the end of said bendable tubular guiding member proximate to said narrow output.

9. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 1, wherein said bendable tubular guiding member defines an elongated open guide path for said ball, said guiding member comprising support structure which maintains said guiding member in a configuration with said guide path in a substantially open configuration without external support.

10. (amended) A ball shooting practice system as in claim 9, wherein said support structure of said bendable tubular guiding member comprises a spiral backbone and a skin secured to said spiral backbone.

11. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 1, wherein said bendable tubular guiding member has a spiral backbone and a skin secured to said spiral back bone.

12. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 1, further comprising a vertical support member with a mating fastener for mating with a fastener which is secured to the end of said bendable tubular guiding member opposite the end of said bendable guiding member proximate to said narrow output.

13. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 1, wherein said ball target is positioned below the top of said tapered guiding member.

14. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 1, wherein the end of said bendable tubular guiding member opposite the end, proximate to said narrow output has a fastener secured proximate to said opposite end whereby said fastener may be secured at a position convenient to the user.

15. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 14, wherein the end of said bendable tubular guiding member opposite the end, proximate to said narrow output is support at a desired position by a support member comprising a pole mounted to a base and an attachment member adapted to attached to the opposite end of said bendable tubular guiding member.

16. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 1, wherein said deflection structure is maintained rigid by a plurality of diagonal support members secured to members forming said deflection structure.

17. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 1, wherein said ball target comprises a rigid hoop and an open bottomed basket secured to said hoop.

18. A ball shooting practice system, comprising:

a) a backboard made of a substantially rigid material;

b) a tapered guiding member having a wide input port and a narrow output, said tapered guiding member being configured and dimensioned to guide a ball into a narrow output defined by said tapered guiding member;

c) a self supporting deflection structure for deflecting balls, which are moving away from the system, and guiding them into said tapered guiding member;

d) a ball target positioned above said narrow output; and

e) a bendable tubular guiding member coupled to said narrow output and configured to receive a ball and guide it toward a player using said ball practice system, wherein the end of said bendable tubular guiding member opposite the end, proximate to said narrow output has a fastener secured proximate to said opposite end, whereby said fastener may be secured at a position convenient to the user.

19. A ball shooting practice system, comprising;

a) a backboard;

b) a tapered guiding member having a wide input port and a narrow output, said tapered guiding member being configured and dimensioned to guide a ball into a narrow output defined by said tapered guiding member;

c) a ball target positioned above said narrow output; and

d) a compressible bendable tubular guiding member coupled to said narrow output and configured to receive a ball and guide it toward a player using said ball shooting practice system.

20. A ball shooting practice system as in claim 19, wherein said compressible bendable tubular member comprises a vertical support member with a mating fastener for mating with a fastener which is secured to the end of said compressible bendable tubular guiding member opposite the end of said compressible bendable tubular guiding member proximate to said narrow output.

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